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A STUDENT ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND ON THE CLASSICS

A periodical entitled *Varsity: The Columbia Literary Monthly*, is published by the students of Columbia University. In the number of this periodical for November, 1920, there is an article entitled *An Educational Pitfall*, by Mr. Walter Winchell (2.22-26). Since we are seldom so fortunate as to know what students seriously think of educational matters, I have thought it worth while to give the substance of Mr. Winchell's paper. Nowadays, he says, the man in the street is talking about vocationalism and its possible benefits to society. The purpose of his paper is to discuss the proposed and actual merits of the scheme. He begins by seeking to dispose of the misconception that vocational training is a new thing; it is "as old as the time when man first walked on the hills. . . . Everybody, except the workingman, receives today adequate vocational training".

A modern narrowness of the term "vocational training" is what we encounter today. The trend is toward "giving each person the general foundation of knowledge and the technical skill required to assure at least a modicum of success in some recognized calling". Another quotation from the same heavy book reads: "What is now demanded is a further modification of the generalized educational program so that it will be an adequate preparation for the trades and ordinary occupations of the masses as well as for the select professions". In other words, education should not broaden a man but make him deep—and narrow as a pipette—in one restricted study.

What does this mean when translated into actual performance? How will the Iceman be educated? The Vocational Idealist will doubtless teach him the rudiments of arithmetic in order that he may make correct change. A maximum of physical training must be his in order to be able to give odds to hundred-weights of ice. He must be familiar with the guidance of decrepit horses. Beyond this, what? With a far-away gleam in his eyes the Vocational Idealist will perhaps recommend the study of physics (to acquaint the Iceman with the formation of ice) and of the geography of the polar regions (the final requirement for the Iceman's Ph.D.). I suggest also research among Early English Oaths (to try on the horses). Our Iceman would then have a Highly Specialized Technical Training for his trade. . . .

Only the most iron-hearted of darkly bespectacled pedagogues (men with Red Neckties, as Chesterton calls the type) would seriously want the widespread adoption of this scheme of vocational education. Such specializing means simply playing into the manicured hands of the aristocracy of wealth, strengthening the grip of the present system. The plutocrats want capable workmen who are tied tight to their jobs and who have not had enough taste of the red blood of life, nor of the honey of learning to make them restless.

Quoting Professor John Dewey, Mr. Winchell declares that cultural studies are not "by dominant purpose socially serviceable". Speaking for himself, he declares that "*thinking power is the last thing generated by practical courses*" (the italics are his).

This amorphous union of aim in subject matter, and in methods of teaching is bad enough; but to recast the program with vocational training occupying all, or even the bulk of the field, would be superlative blindness to the genuine advantage of all concerned—at least under the present conditions of society. The proposed system is eternally opposed to genuinely democratic vision. Proponents of New Schooling may confuse the issue with mouthings about "the problem of industrial training" (as tho today there ought to be any such thing as mere industrial training) and about "study of correlated subjects" (which means a night school course in architecture for the incipient Bricklayer). But thru such verbal barrages we can see the ugly shape of Inequality. To quote Professor Dewey's "Democracy and Education" again:

"There is a standing danger that education will perpetuate the traditions for a select few, and effect its adjustment to the newer economic conditions more or less on the basis of acquiescence in the transformed, unrationalized, and unsocialized phases of our defective industrial régime. Put in concrete terms, there is danger that vocational education will be interpreted in theory and practice as trade education: as a means of securing technical efficiency in specialized future pursuits. Education would then become an instrument of perpetuating unchanged the existing industrial order of society, instead of operating as a means for its transformation".

There are numerous other objections which, to say the least, should give pause to any rational-feeling person before he commits himself to a program of industrialized training. First of all, how many children in elementary schools have a sufficient maturity of mind, or properly adjusted perspective on life, to choose a vocation? None. And no amount of guidance, such as is proposed, will better the situation. The abilities and inclinations of boys and girls must have time to bud and blossom. . . .

Let us visit for a month in an imaginary Occupational School, and note the operation of youth in choosing its life-work. Charley, Ned and Augustus, three youthful friends of mine, are studying there. At first, Charley and Ned were enthusiastically pursuing the art of carpentering, in which their interest had been aroused by watching a house in process of construction on the next block. The previous desire of Augustus had been to be a star third baseman all his life, and the experts had been puzzled as how to fulfill his ambition. But recently, however, he had decided to be a mere locomotive engineer. When Ned's brother returned from France, Ned, inspired with patriotic fires, turned his aims toward making himself a captain of artillery. Now with Ned absent, carpentry, once a rosy career, grew pale in Charley's imagination, and he made up his mind "finally" to become a fireman. Augustus in turn

veered from railroading and after reading "Peary at the Pole" elected exploring instead.

I fear that if pliable minds like these of this trio were compelled to hold to the hard pattern of their earliest aspirations, we would have no philosophers, no sociologists, no teachers. We would have, however, material for one hundred thousand Presidents of the United States.

The question of the classics is a corollary which presents important aspects. There is space here, however, for only the briefest mention of this phase. Much has been said pro and con on the value of Latin and Greek in popular education. This is like debating the value of health. It seems to me that the matter primarily is not one of value at all. It is a matter of justice to the pupil, and thru him to the world. Those of us who rail about the uselessness of classical training in a "modern" world utter their anathema in a language which owes most of its beauties to Latin and Greek, and in a civilization whose culture, such as it is, is built in large measure of the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.

The classics have a justification in themselves entirely apart from their importance as adjuncts of other branches of learning. They are not intended as aids to a raise in salary. They have a higher practicability—the creation of a *complete secondary existence*. Dollars cannot conjure up vistas to compare with these scenes of splendor and of serenity open to the scholar's mind. Latin and Greek should not be thrust down the throats of unwilling children when they are young, and to the neglect of their mother tongue. But this is forever true; he who does not have both opportunity and encouragement to know the wonder of ancient poetry in all its fragrance, to know the fineness of ancient thought in all its freshness—such a man or woman is deprived of a birthright.

This is why the classics must live, not because of any actual or trumped up value as auxiliary to other learning. However, the terminology of modern science sounds remarkably like the speech of Cicero and Pericles, and Greek and Latin are probably of great assistance in keeping the student of engineering or botany or physics in ready and accurate touch with his vocabulary; so there is still a mere utilitarian value here. Finally, Greek, at least, remains a marvelous discipline for the brain. Subtlety of distinction, closeness of reasoning, keenness of memory, all are required of the Greek student. If he possesses this flexibility in potential form, Greek will make it kinetic. Taking Greek is like taking a dare.

C. K.

THE PARABLE OF MENENIUS AGRIPPA¹

No doubt you all remember the incident in Livy 2.32, where the revolt of the Plebs and their departure to the Sacred Mountain cause such apprehension in Rome; also that Agrippa persuaded them to come back by the use of Aesop's fable, 'The Belly and the Members'. Livy evidently wished to forestall the charge of down-right language, for he warns us that Agrippa was accustomed to *prisco dicendi et horrido modo*. If the conciliator had known as much of the human body as we know to-day, perhaps he would have used the term *cor* instead of *venter*, thus making a prettier fable and one quite as apposite. However, the point would have been

the same for my purpose. That point is to emphasize the value and the need of recognizing the close relationship which exists among all the branches we study in our Schools. Just at present, we seem to have arrived at a stage of dispersion rather than cooperation. The curriculum is being constantly crowded with new subjects of study; the Colleges are offering a much wider choice for entrance; in short, the situation is well described by the scriptural phrase, 'Each one did what was right in his own eyes'. I do not know how you view the situation, but my own observation leads me to conclude that information is more sought for than training, and too many educators are of the opinion that unrelated blocks of fact in a half dozen departments will, somehow, be fused into a coherent mass, possibly on the supposition that, if sufficient pressure of matter be secured, the heat thus generated will melt and weld the whole together.

Professor Thorndike, of Columbia University, has remarked there there is no law of compensation whereby a weak will is balanced by great intelligence. We may not relish the distinction, but it seems to me that Latin is the subject above all others in which both are necessary. In fact, it is an accurate touch-stone of will power, without which no knowledge of Latin can be attained. I am inclined to think that we can do no better service for the present generation of pupils than to inject a little more stiffness into their vertebrae by liberal doses of Latin. They may hate it, as many of them say they do, but the subject is a search light which reveals the presence or the absence of will power, without which no student will ever amount to anything. If they really have such a power, even in a rudimentary state, we can generally elicit a response that will inspire that will to more vigorous action. I have known many such cases.

In the last analysis, the contention we make, a contention, too, which most thinkers on serious subjects accept as valid, that Latin has unusual disciplinary value, can be reduced to this—that it makes of the intellectual powers an exceedingly keen agency for handling thoughts of any kind. We are so familiar with the statements of what Latin can do for powers of observation, induction, deduction, in short, the ability to think, that no time need be spent on that; but there is one phase of the matter that may well be brought out. I mean the training in power of written or oral expression. The sciences and the mathematical subjects are so closely wedded to formulae and symbols that they can scarcely be said to have a language at all, whereas the investigation of the facts in a Latin sentence is but the beginning of the process: the effort to put the results of the preliminary survey into adequate and satisfactory language is the real test of one's power. If we did nothing more in these days than keep a restraining hand on the loose vagaries of English speech and writing, we should have performed a valuable service. To say nothing of the formless writing in most of the lighter publications, we cannot fail to be impressed with

¹This paper was read at the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States, at The Johns Hopkins University, May 1, 1920.